

Amendments To The Claims:

1. (Currently amended) A loading apparatus for loading a self-expanding stent into a catheter delivery system in combination with a crimping apparatus for reducing the diameter of said self-expanding stent from a first diameter to a second diameter prior to loading said self-expanding stent into said catheter delivery system, said crimping apparatus comprising at least three coupled, movable blades which form an aperture whose size may be varied, said loading apparatus having an alignment plug with a tapered portion for matingly engaging a tapered portion of an actuation hub of said crimping apparatus.

2. (Cancelled)

3. (Previously presented) The loading apparatus of claim 1, wherein the mating engagement of said tapered portions provides for coaxial self-alignment between a lumen of the loading apparatus and a crimping chamber of said crimping apparatus.

4. (Currently amended) An apparatus for loading a medical device into a catheter delivery system, the apparatus constructed and arranged to matingly engage a crimping apparatus having a crimping chamber for reducing the diameter of said medical device from a first diameter to a second diameter prior to loading said medical device into said catheter delivery system;

the apparatus comprising an introducer shaft having an internal lumen for receiving an outer catheter shaft of said catheter delivery system, the introducer shaft comprising an introducer plug having a lumen through which the medical device is introduced, wherein the lumen of said introducer plug tapers from an opening having a larger diameter at an opening of the introducer shaft to an opening having a smaller diameter for engaging said outer catheter shaft, and wherein the mating engagement between said apparatus and said crimping apparatus provides for coaxial self-alignment between said internal lumen and said crimping chamber.

5-7. (Cancelled)

8. (Currently amended) The apparatus of claim [[7]] 4 wherein said introducer plug has a length which is slightly less than the length of a stent strut.

9. (Currently amended) The apparatus of claim [[6]] 4 wherein said introducer plug is modular with said introducer shaft.

10. (Currently amended) The apparatus of claim [[6]] 4 wherein said introducer plug has conical flanged edges extending from said opening for engaging an outer catheter shaft.

11. (Currently amended) The apparatus of claim [[6]] 4 wherein said introducer plug has flat edges at said opening for engaging an outer catheter shaft within said introducer shaft.
12. (Previously Presented) In combination, a crimping apparatus for reducing the diameter of a medical device from a first diameter to a second diameter and a loading apparatus for introducing said medical device into a catheter delivery system, the crimping apparatus comprising at least three coupled, movable blades which form an aperture whose size may be varied, the crimping apparatus comprising an internal taper constructed and arranged to matingly engage an external taper on the loading apparatus, said loading apparatus comprising a plug, the plug having the external taper.
13. (Previously presented) The combination of claim 12, said crimping apparatus having an actuation hub, said actuation hub having the internal taper for matingly engaging a loading apparatus.
14. (Previously presented) The combination of claim 13, said loading apparatus comprising a plug, the plug having the external taper for matingly engaging said actuation hub of said crimping apparatus.
15. (Cancelled)
16. (Currently amended) In combination, a crimping apparatus for reducing the diameter of a medical device from a first diameter to a second diameter and a loading apparatus for introducing said medical device into a catheter delivery system, said crimping apparatus comprising at least three coupled, movable blades which form an aperture whose size may be varied, said crimping apparatus comprising a tapered portion constructed and arranged to matingly engage a complementary tapered portion of said loading apparatus.
17. (Cancelled)
18. (Original) The combination of claim 16 wherein said loading apparatus further comprises an introducer shaft.
19. (Original) The combination of claim 18 wherein said introducer shaft has an external triangular configuration.
20. (Original) The combination of claim 19, said introducer shaft further comprising an introducer plug.
21. (Original) The combination of claim 18, said introducer plug having a lumen tapering from a

first opening having a larger diameter adjacent the opening of the introducer shaft through which a medical device is introduced and a second opening having a smaller diameter for engaging an outer catheter shaft within said introducer shaft.

22. (Previously presented) The combination of claim 21 wherein said first opening has a diameter which is slightly larger than an aperture of a crimping apparatus which has been sized to receive a stent therein.

23. (Previously presented) The combination of claim 21 wherein said second opening has a diameter which is slightly larger than the diameter of an outer catheter shaft.

24. (Original) The combination of claim 20 wherein said introducer plug has a length which is slightly less than the length of a stent strut.

25. (Previously presented) An apparatus for reducing the diameter of a medical device from a first diameter to a second diameter and loading the medical device into a catheter, the apparatus comprising a crimping portion having at least three coupled, movable blades which form an aperture whose size may be varied and a tool for matingly engaging a loading portion of the apparatus, the loading portion having a tapered internal lumen.

26. (Original) The apparatus of claim 25 wherein said tool is a conical flange adjacent the edge of said at least one of said blades.

27. (Original) The apparatus of claim 25 wherein said tool is integral with at least one of said blades.

28. (Original) The apparatus of claim 25 wherein each of said blades has a tool which is integral with the blade.

29. (Original) The apparatus of claim 25 wherein said tool is modular to at least one of said blades.

30. (Original) The apparatus of claim 25 wherein each of said blades has a modular tool.

31. (Original) The apparatus of claim 25 wherein said tool is modular with all of said blades.

32. (Original) The apparatus of claim 25 wherein said at least one tool is attached to at least one of said blades mechanically.

33. (Original) The apparatus of claim 32 wherein said at least one tool is attached to at least one of said blades with a screw, thread, weld or adhesively.

34. (Original) The apparatus of claim 25 wherein said at least one tool is polymeric, metallic or a

combination thereof.

35. (Original) The apparatus of claim 25 wherein said at least one tool is formed from the same material as said blades.

36. (Original) The apparatus of claim 25 wherein said at least one tool is formed from at least one polymeric material selected from the group consisting of polyolefins, polyamides, polyesters, polyurethanes, polyacetals, polycarbonate, copolymers thereof and mixtures thereof.

37. (Original) The apparatus of claim 36 wherein said at least one polymeric material is selected from the group consisting of nylon, polyethylene terephthalate, polybutylene terephthalate, acetal homopolymers, polyetherether ketone, and mixtures thereof.

38. (Original) The apparatus of claim 25 wherein said at least one tool is formed from at least one metal selected from the group consisting of copper, cobalt, stainless steel, steel, aluminum, and alloys thereof.

39. (Original) The apparatus of claim 38 further comprising a coating which reduces the coefficient of friction.

40. (Original) The apparatus of claim 39 wherein said coating comprises polytetrafluoroethylene.

41. (Original) The apparatus of claim 25 wherein said at least one tool is formed from ceramic.

42. (Original) The apparatus of claim 25 wherein said medical device is a stent.

43. (Previously Presented) An apparatus comprising a crimping portion for crimping a medical device and a loading portion for loading said medical device into a catheter, the crimping portion having at least three coupled, movable blades which form a crimping aperture, the loading portion having an internal lumen, the apparatus constructed and arranged for coaxial self-alignment between the crimping aperture and the internal lumen.

44-48. (Cancelled)

49. (Previously presented) The apparatus of claim 4, wherein said introducer shaft has an outer triangular configuration.